

Marian & Carmelite Spirituality

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I. Mary, Queen of Contemplation

1. “All who heard it were amazed at what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept [*synteréo*] all these things, reflecting [*symbálló*] on them in her heart” (Luke 2:18-19; NAB).



2. “But (Mary and Joseph) did not understand [*syníemi*] what he said to them. (Jesus) went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept [*diateréo*] all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:50-51; NAB).

3. “To pray always without becoming weary” (Luke 18:1; NAB).

4. “Each one shall remain in his cell or near it, meditating day and night on the Law of the Lord and watching in prayer, unless otherwise justly occupied” (*The Carmelite Rule of St. Albert of Jerusalem*, §5).

5. “The Virgin Mary is present in a special way, most of all as a model of faithfulness in listening to the Lord and in service to Him and to others. Mary is the one who preserved in her heart the life and actions of her Son and meditated on them, providing for us an example of contemplation” (*Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order*, §4).





6. “Secular Carmelites are called to strive to make prayer penetrate their whole existence, in order to walk in the presence of the living God...the whole of their life is a prayer, a search for union with God...to see through events and discover God in everything” (*Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order*, §§17-18).

7. “In the interior dynamism of following Jesus, Carmel contemplates Mary as Mother and Sister, as ‘the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord’...the Secular Carmelite is committed to knowing Mary better, daily, through the Gospel to communicate to others an authentic Marian devotion leading to imitating her virtues” (*Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order*, §§29, 31).

8. “The mission of the Discalced Carmelite Order is to know God that he may be known...Our primary devotion to Mary is to regard her as our model of contemplative life and emulate her in our mental prayer and our practice of the presence of God” (*OCDS Provincial Statutes for the Washington Province of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, §§25, 29).



9. “Every woman who wants to fulfill her destiny must look to Mary as ideal. The most pure virgin is the only one safeguarded from every stain of sin. Except for her, no one embodies feminine nature in its original purity. Every other woman has something in herself inherited from Eve, and she must search for the way from Eve to Mary” (Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 119).



10. “The soul of woman must therefore be *expansive* and open to all human beings; it must be *quiet* so that no small weak flame will be extinguished by stormy winds; *warm* so as not to benumb fragile buds; *clear*, so that no vermin will settle in dark corners and recesses; *self-contained*, so that no invasions from without can imperil the inner life; *empty of itself*, in order that extraneous life may have room in it; finally, *mistress of itself* and also of its body, so that the entire person is readily at the disposal of every call. That is an ideal image of the gestalt [‘shape/form’] of the feminine soul. The soul of the first woman was formed for this purpose, and so, too, was the soul of the Mother of God. In all other women since the Fall, there is an embryo of such development, but it needs particular cultivation if it is not to be suffocated among weeds rankly shooting up around it” (Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 132-133).



II. Mary, Soul-Model and Heart of the Church

11. “The Church is that humanity newly created and redeemed through Christ. The original cell of all redeemed humanity is Mary, in whom first took place the purification and sanctification through Christ and impregnation by the Holy Spirit. Before the Son of Man was born of the Virgin, the Son of God conceived of this very virgin as one full of grace, and He created the Church in and with her” (Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 238).



12. “Mary is the most perfect symbol of the Church because she is its prefiguration and origin. She is also a unique organ of the Church, that organ from which the entire Mystical Body, even the Head itself, was formed. She might be called, and happily so, the heart of the Church in order to indicate her central and vital position in it...The title of Mary as our mother is not merely symbolic. Mary is our mother in the most real and lofty sense, a sense which surpasses that of earthly maternity. She begot our life of grace for us because she offered up her entire being, body and soul, as the Mother of God. That is why an intimate bond exists between Mary and ourselves. She loves us, she knows us, she exerts herself to bring each one of us into the closest possible relationship with the Lord – that which we are above all supposed to be” (Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 240-241).

13. “The motherhood of Mary is the paradigm of all motherhood. Like Mary, every human mother is called to be mother with her whole soul, so as to pour the abundant riches of her soul into the soul of her child...In order to be human in body and soul, (Jesus) had to be born like a human being. And since it was to be his nourishment to do the will of his heavenly Father (John 4:34), the mother whose nature was to be his first nourishment had to give herself over to the will of the heavenly Father with the whole power of her soul” (Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 517).



III. Mary, Servant of the Other in Poverty and Love

14. “Prayer and comfortable living are incompatible” (Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 4:2).

15. “Now realize that anyone who doesn’t know how to set up the pieces for a game of chess won’t know how to play well. And if he doesn’t know how to check his opponent’s king, he won’t know how to checkmate it either...and how quickly, if we play it often, will we checkmate this divine King, who will not be able to escape, nor will He want to. The queen is the piece that can carry on the best battle in this game, and all the other pieces help. There’s no queen like humility for making the King surrender. Humility drew the King from heaven to the womb of the Virgin, and with it, by one hair, we will draw Him to our souls. And realize that the one who has more humility will be the one who possesses Him more; and the one who has less will possess Him less. For I cannot understand how there could be humility without love or love without humility; nor are these two virtues possible without detachment from all creatures” (Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 16:1-2).



16. “God alone moves these souls toward those works that are in harmony with his will and ordinance, and they cannot be moved toward others. Thus the works and prayers of these souls always produce their effect. Such was the prayer and work of our Lady, the most glorious Virgin. Raised from the beginning to this high state, she never had the form of any creature impressed in her soul, nor was she moved by any, for she was always moved by the Holy Spirit” (John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 3.2.10).



17. “Oh, secrets of God! Here there is no more to do than surrender our intellects and reflect that they are of no avail when it comes to understanding the grandeurs of God. It is good to recall here how God acted with the Blessed Virgin, our Lady. In spite of all her wisdom she asked the angel: *How can this be?* But after he answered, *The Holy Spirit will come upon you; the power of the Most High will overshadow you*, she engaged in no further discussion. As one who had such great faith and wisdom, she understood at once that if these two intervened, there was nothing more to know or doubt. She did not act as do some learned men (whom the Lord does not lead by this mode of prayer and who haven’t begun a life of prayer), for they want to be so rational about things and so precise in their understanding that it doesn’t seem anyone else but they with their learning can understand the grandeurs of God. If only they would learn something from the humility of the most Blessed Virgin!” (Teresa of Avila, *Meditations on the Song of Songs*, 6:7).



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Poetry

Excerpt from “To Our Lady of Perpetual Help” by Thérèse of Lisieux (1897)

Dear Mother, from my tender youth
Your sweet picture has delighted by heart.
In your gaze I could read your tenderness,
And near you I found happiness.

Virgin Mary, after this exile I'll go
To the Celestial shore to see you forever,
But here below your sweet Picture
Is my Perpetual Help!...



“The Pool of God” by Jessica Powers (1950; 1984)

There was nothing in the Virgin's soul
that belonged to the Virgin –
no word, no thought, no image, no intent.
She was a pure, transparent pool reflecting
God, only God.
She held His burnished day; she held His night
of planet-glow or shade inscrutable.
God was her sky and she who mirrored Him
became His firmament.

When I so much as turn my thoughts toward her
my spirit is enisled in her repose.
And when I gaze into her selfless depths
an anguish in me grows
to hold such blueness and to hold such fire.
I pray to hollow out my earth and be
filled with these waters of transparency.
I think that one could die of this desire,
seeing oneself dry earth or stubborn sod.
Oh, to become a pure pool like the Virgin,
water that lost the semblances of water
and was a sky like God.

“And In Her Morning” by Jessica Powers (1945; 1946)

The Virgin Mary cannot enter into
my soul for an indwelling. God alone
has sealed this land as secretly His own;
but being mother and implored, she comes
to stand along my eastern sky and be
a drift of sunrise over God and me.

God is a light and genitor of light.
Yet for our weakness and our punishment
He hides Himself in midnights that prevent
all save the least awareness of Him.
We strain with dimmed eyes inward and perceive
no stir of what we clamored to believe.
Yet I say: God (if one may jest with God),
Your hiding has not reckoned with Our Lady
who holds my east horizon and whose glow
lights up my inner landscape, high and low.
All my soul's acres shine and shine with her!
You are discovered, God; awake, rise
out of the dark of Your Divine surprise!
Your own reflection has revealed Your place,
for she is utter light by Your own grace.
And in her light I find You hid within me,
and in her morning I can see Your Face.



Carmelite Spirituality

Fast Facts:

- Carmelite religious order founded by a group of European hermits on Mt. Carmel in the 12th century (no specific founder by name), inspired by the narrative of the prophet Elijah (see 1 Kings 19:1-18; “I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts”); especially devoted to Mary, Mother of God [‘Carm-el’ = ‘garden of God’]; original title of religious community: ‘Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel’
- Rule of life given to the Carmelites in 1214 by St. Albert of Avogadro, Patriarch of Jerusalem
- Among the canonized Carmelite saints: St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), St. Titus Brandsma (1881-1942), St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (1891-1942)
- Carmelite Charism:
 - Allegiance to Christ
 - Contemplation / Solitude / Silence / Lectio Divina
 - Humility
 - Charity
 - Fraternity
 - Service
- Brown Scapular: centuries-old sign of consecrating oneself to the Blessed Virgin Mary, symbolic of putting on the virtues of Mary and putting oneself under her maternal protection; scapular made from brown cloth reminiscent of the traditional Carmelite Friar’s garb; according to a tradition, Carmelite St. Simon Stock received the brown scapular during an apparition of the Blessed Mother in 1251 in England, through which Mary promised special assistance to those who wear the scapular.

